

## Seminar on 1915 Massacre of Armenians to Go Ahead

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**By SEBNEM ARSU**

ISTANBUL, Sept. 23 - After a Turkish court's decision to cancel an academic conference on the killing of hundreds of thousands of Armenians during World War I, the conference's organizers said Friday that the event would go ahead at a new location on Saturday. The organizers were encouraged by a wave of support from the European Union and senior Turkish government officials.

A court on Thursday blocked Bogazici University in Istanbul from holding the event, a debate and symposium on the killing of Armenians by Ottoman forces in the eastern part of what is now [Turkey](#). In its ruling, the court called into question the credentials of the scholars taking part.

It was the second time the courts blocked the conference at the request of nationalist groups. The event was canceled in May as well, and at that time Justice Minister Cemil Cicek condemned continued attempts to hold the meeting as "treason" and a "stab in the back of the Turkish nation."

But the conference's organizers said it would go ahead on Saturday, after Bilgi University in Istanbul agreed to be the new host. One of the leaders of the conference, Prof. Halil Berktag, said integrity of scholars was "beyond the judiciary" to decide.

The conference is to be the first time in Turkey that the killings have been publicly examined. More than 50 intellectuals, scholars and writers are to analyze the massacres, which took place from 1915 to 1917 and have been recognized as genocide by several European governments. Turkey has long maintained that the deaths were part of a war in which an equal number of Turks died.

The court's action on Thursday came as a blow to supporters of Turkey's application for membership in the European Union, who have considered the conference as an opportunity to prove that the country had the potential for greater democratization and freedom of speech.

Turkey's chief negotiator with the European Union, Ali Babacan, said the decision was part of an attempt by nationalists to sabotage Turkey's membership talks, which are to start on Oct. 3. The ruling also was condemned by Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul and Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan.